

Now soccer is more popular than Rugby Union!

NEWPORT, with a population of 110,000, was a world famous stronghold of Rugby Union when a handful of Soccer enthusiasts gambled on forming Newport County A.F.C. in 1912. Nobody ever thought, in those distant days, that Soccer would one day become a serious rival to the glamorous rugby club. But in fact, Soccer is now the bigger attraction.

Founding the Soccer club appears to have been quite a casual affair. An informal gathering in a local pub agreed that it might be a good thing for the game if the County of Monmouthshire could have a team (hence the name Newport County). Almost at once — although there were no players and no ground! — they acquired membership of the Second Division of the Southern League.

They were due to start operations just a few weeks later; Somerton Park, still the club's home, was rented; dressing rooms (plus a wooden hut for

the Press) were organised, and the newly-appointed player-manager scraped a team together with only days to spare.

Times were hard and that first season was one of the wettest on record. Often the chairman had to go around the town on a Friday night collecting enough money for the next day's travelling — and an even bigger scramble for the Monday pay-day. The club lost £700 in their first season.

But they staggered from one crisis to another until the shutdown for World War I and

when, in season 1920-21, the Southern League became Division 3 of the Football League, Newport were duly elected.

Since then, the word most often used to describe Newport County's career has been "chequered". Often the club has been on the verge of bankruptcy and faced with the prospect of having to quit the League. Almost as frequently they have been forced to seek re-election.

Once, in season 1930-31, they failed to get it, although by the summer of 1932 they were back

in, largely because London club Thames Athletic dropped out.

The biggest change in the club's fortunes came in 1937 with the appointment of an unknown Irishman, Billy McCandless, as manager. Within a decade he was to pilot all three South Wales teams, Newport, Cardiff and Swansea, to promotion.

Not only was a Newport attendance record of 24,268 achieved in October of that year (for the match with neighbours Cardiff) but the following season, 1938-39, became the greatest in the

club's history. They reached the top of the Third Division on October 8 and stayed there for the rest of the season.

They played only three matches in the Second Division, beating Southampton 3-1, drawing 1-1 with Spurs, and losing 2-1 to Nottingham Forest. The latter being only hours before World War II erupted.

By the end of it the club was virtually non-existent, Somerton Park was derelict — and the manager had to beg clothing coupons to provide kit for the largely untried players he had gathered around him.

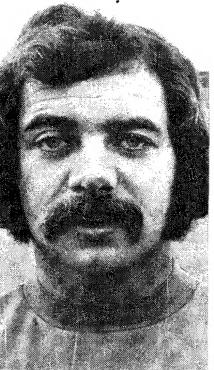
Small wonder that they were relegated at the end of their first and only season in the Second Division. One of their defeats, the biggest-ever, was by 13-0 at Newcastle.

Newport's best F.A. Cup displays came in 1948-49 when they beat Brighton, Leytonstone, Leeds and Huddersfield before visiting Portsmouth, then top of Division 1, in Round 5. County were knocked out 3-2.

Billy Lucas, who has been Newport's manager off and on for 20 years, made his debut as player-manager for the club in December 1953 after winning several Welsh caps with Swindon and Swansea. He was having one of his spells outside the game when Newport were relegated to Division 4 at the end of season 1961-62.

That's where they have been ever since, despite three successive applications for re-election between 1968-71.

Last season they celebrated their Diamond Jubilee as a League club. And they missed promotion by a fraction of a goal, Aldershot taking fourth place by a goal average advantage of .12.



WILLIE BROWN
... top scorer



HAROLD JARMAN
... wing-winger

DISAPPOINTING START

AFTER last season's long promotion cliffhanger when Newport missed the Division III boat by a fraction of a goal, County made a disappointingly muted start to this campaign.

Not until their sixth league game did they register their first win — a 4-2 home success against Crewe which lifted the club out of the Division IV basement.

Top striker Willie Brown, who last season notched 16 league goals, failed to get on the scoresheet until the eighth game against Stockport. And by that time manager Billy Lucas had long since discarded his 4-2-4 experiment of all out attack. This policy proved something of a failure as Newport were just not establishing any sort of controlled authority in midfield.

As a result, Newport's problems this season have centred around an irritating inconsistency and a sad lack of scoring power and finish. And the absence of Welsh under-23 cap Jeff Thomas hasn't helped.

The talented Thomas was stretchered off with a knee injury at Reading in September 1972. He has taken the advice of a specialist and has given up his career because of an arthritic knee condition — a big blow to a club like Newport.

Linkman Brian Godfrey, who has skippered the side recently in place of veteran Brian Harris (with whom he once played at Everton), has hit improved form lately and Newport recently beat Hartlepool to get their first away win of the season.

This success, together with Somerton Park victories over Rotherham (1-0), Mansfield (3-0) and Northampton (3-1) must rank as County highlights so far this season.

Club officials remain quietly optimistic about the team's future prospects and chances of presenting a real challenge before the season is very much older. They are banking on a good cup run to boost the confidence of the side for the future.